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ABSTRACT

This report, based on the 1980 and 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Public Use Microdata Samples, presents statistics on America's U.S. children. The report focuses on family living arrangements and economic circumstances. Special attention is devoted to similarities and differences between non-Hispanic white children and non-Hispanic black or Hispanic origin children. Written summaries along with charts and graphs detail the demographic data. Key findings include: (1) throughout the past 50 years, fewer than one-half of children have lived in "traditional" families where the father was a full-time worker and the mother a full-time homemaker; (2) a majority live with two parents, but an increasing proportion have only one parent in the home; (3) nearly all who live with a father have a father who is employed, but many have fathers who work part-time; (4) most children who live with a mother only have a mother who works for pay; (5) for every child that lives in a "traditional" two-parent family, four children live in "nontraditional" two-parent families; (6) the proportion of children living in families with high incomes increased during the 1980s, as did the proportion living in low-income or poverty level families; and (7) whether they live with two parents or only a mother, black and Hispanic children experience much higher poverty rates than white children. (EV)

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We the American...

Children

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We, the American Children

Introduction

We, the American children, numbered 63.6 million in 1990. This report focuses on our family living arrangements and our economic circumstances. Special attention is devoted to similarities and differences between non-Hispanic White children and non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic origin children.

Throughout the past 50 years, fewer than one-half of us have lived in "traditional" families where the father was a full-time worker and the mother a full-time homemaker. A majority of us live with two parents, but an increasing proportion have only one parent in the home. Few of us have grandparents in the home, and most of us live in families with only one, two, or three children.

Nearly all of us who live with a father have a father who is employed, but many of us have fathers who work part-time. Most of us who live with a mother only, have a mother who works for pay. For every child who lives in a "traditional" family where the father is a full-time worker and the mother a full-time homemaker, four children live in "nontraditional" two-parent families. Even at age 1, only one-sixth of us live in "traditional" two-parent families.

The proportion of us living in families with high incomes increased during the 1980's, and the proportion with low and poverty level incomes also increased during the 1980's. Children living with two parents have high family incomes compared with children living with one parent.

Whether we have high or low family incomes also depends on the amount of time our parents work. Children in "traditional" two-parent families and children living in mother-only families where the mother works full time are similar in their chances of having a low family income and living in poverty. Whether we live with two parents or only our mother, Black and Hispanic children experience much higher poverty rates than White children.

Since 1940, a minority of us have lived in "traditional" families with a full-time working father and a homemaker mother.

In 1940, only 43 percent of children lived in "traditional" families with a father who worked full time year round and a mother who was not in the labor force.

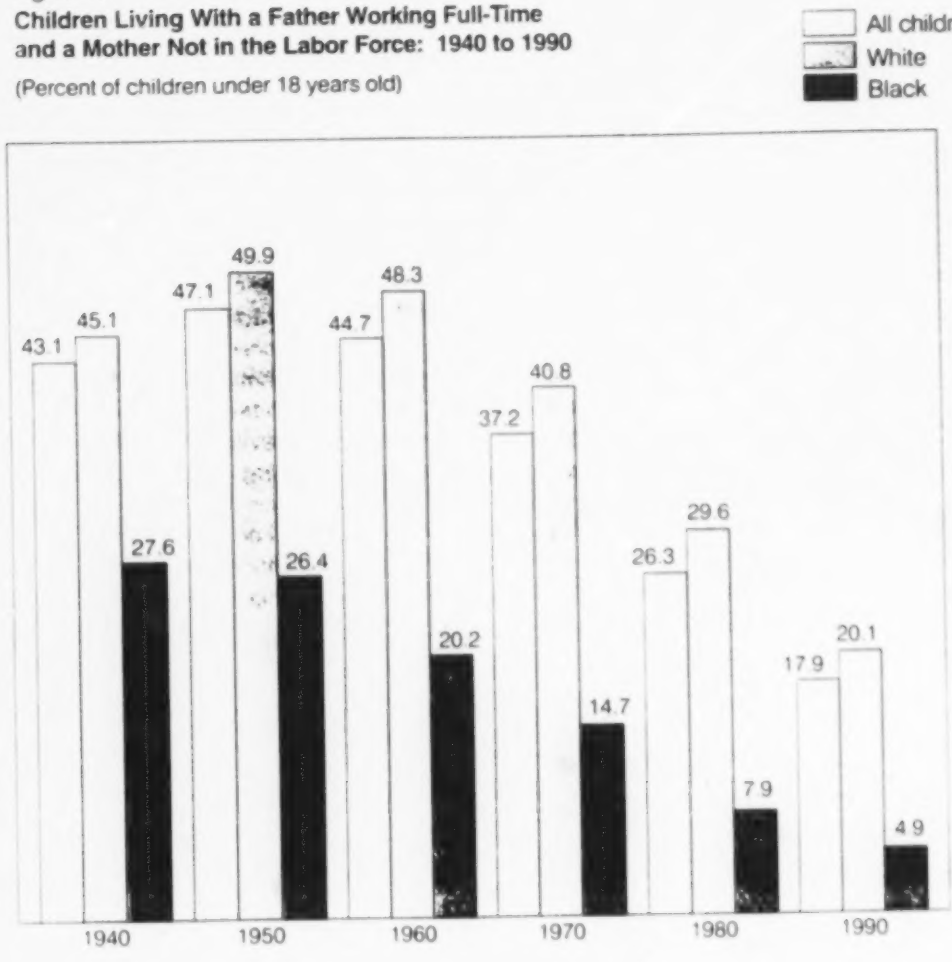
The proportion of children living in "traditional" families rose to 47 percent in 1950, but a majority of children continued to live in "nontraditional" families.

After 1950, "traditional" family living declined, and by 1990 fewer than one-fifth of all children lived in families with fathers as full-time providers and homemaking mothers.

Between 1940 and 1960, only 45 to 50 percent of White children lived in "traditional" families, and this declined to 20 percent in 1990.

Since 1940, fewer than 30 percent of Black children lived with fathers who were full-time workers and mothers who were full-time homemakers, and this declined to only 5 percent in 1990.

Figure 1.
Children Living With a Father Working Full-Time and a Mother Not in the Labor Force: 1940 to 1990
(Percent of children under 18 years old)



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Two-thirds of us are non-Hispanic Whites, while one-third of us belong to racial or ethnic groups.

The 1990 census counted 63,604,432 children under age 18.

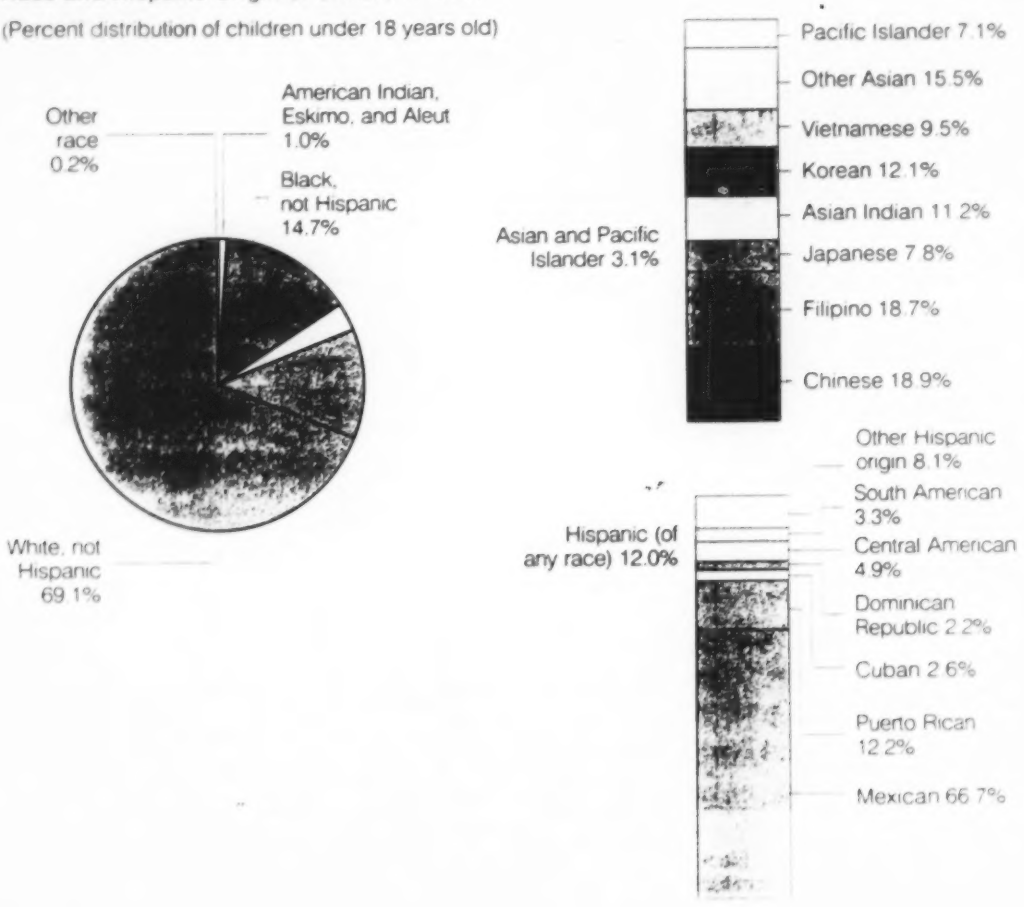
About two-thirds of American children were White but not of Hispanic origin, while nearly one-third were non-White or Hispanic.

Non-Hispanic Black children were the largest non-White group (15 percent).

Hispanic children accounted for 12 percent of all children. Two-thirds of Hispanic children were of Mexican origin. But many Hispanic children traced their origins to Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Honduras, or other Central and South American countries.

Three percent of American children belonged to Asian and Pacific Islander groups, including Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Asian Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Thai, and Hmong.

Figure 2.
Race and Hispanic Origin of Children: 1990
(Percent distribution of children under 18 years old)



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Most of us live with two parents, but our chances of living in a one-parent family rose during the 1980's.

Children living with two parents declined substantially from 77 percent in 1980 to 72 percent in 1990, while those living with one parent increased from 18 percent to 24 percent.

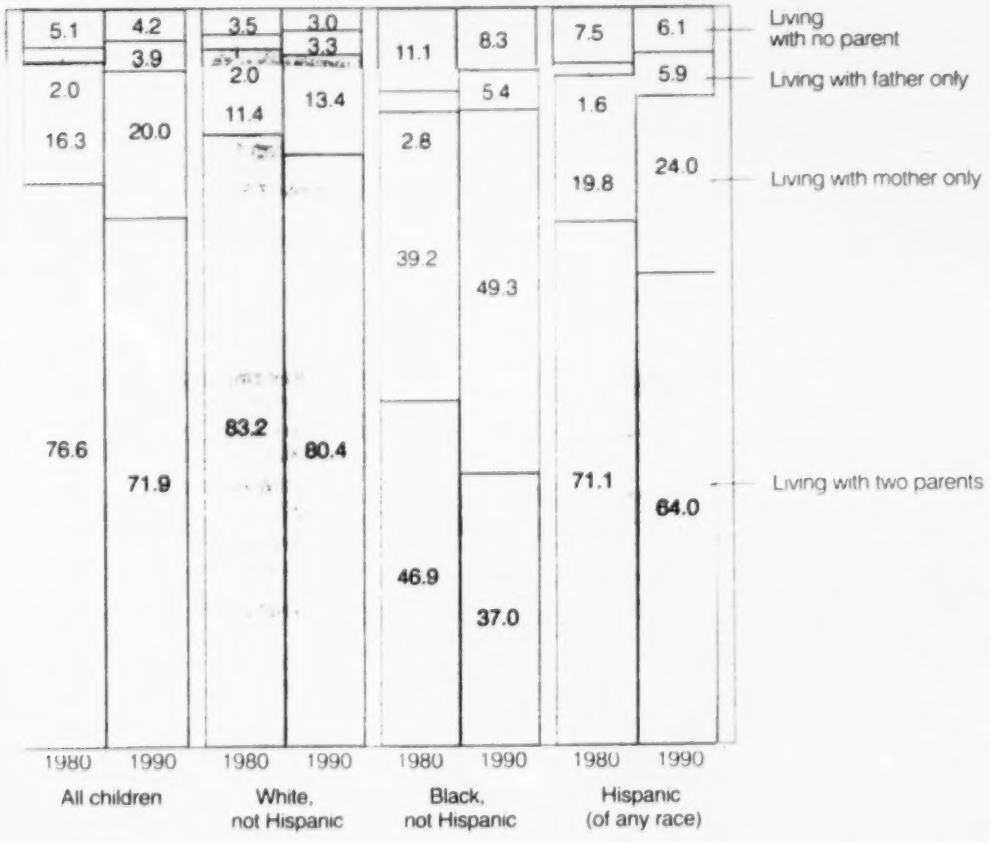
In 1990, the total proportion with one parent or no parent in the home was 20 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, 63 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks, and 36 percent for Hispanics.

During the 1980's, the proportion of children living with one parent rose by 3 percentage points for non-Hispanic Whites, by 13 percentage points for non-Hispanic Blacks, and by 9 percentage points for Hispanics.

More than 4 out of every 5 children living with one parent in 1980 and in 1990 lived with their mother.

Children living with only their father doubled from 2 percent to 4 percent during the 1980's, but the rise in mother-only families accounted for most of the increase in one-parent family living.

Figure 3.
Parental Living Arrangements of Children: 1980 and 1990
(Percent distribution of children under 18 years old)



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Whether we live with two parents or one, few of us have a grandparent in the home.

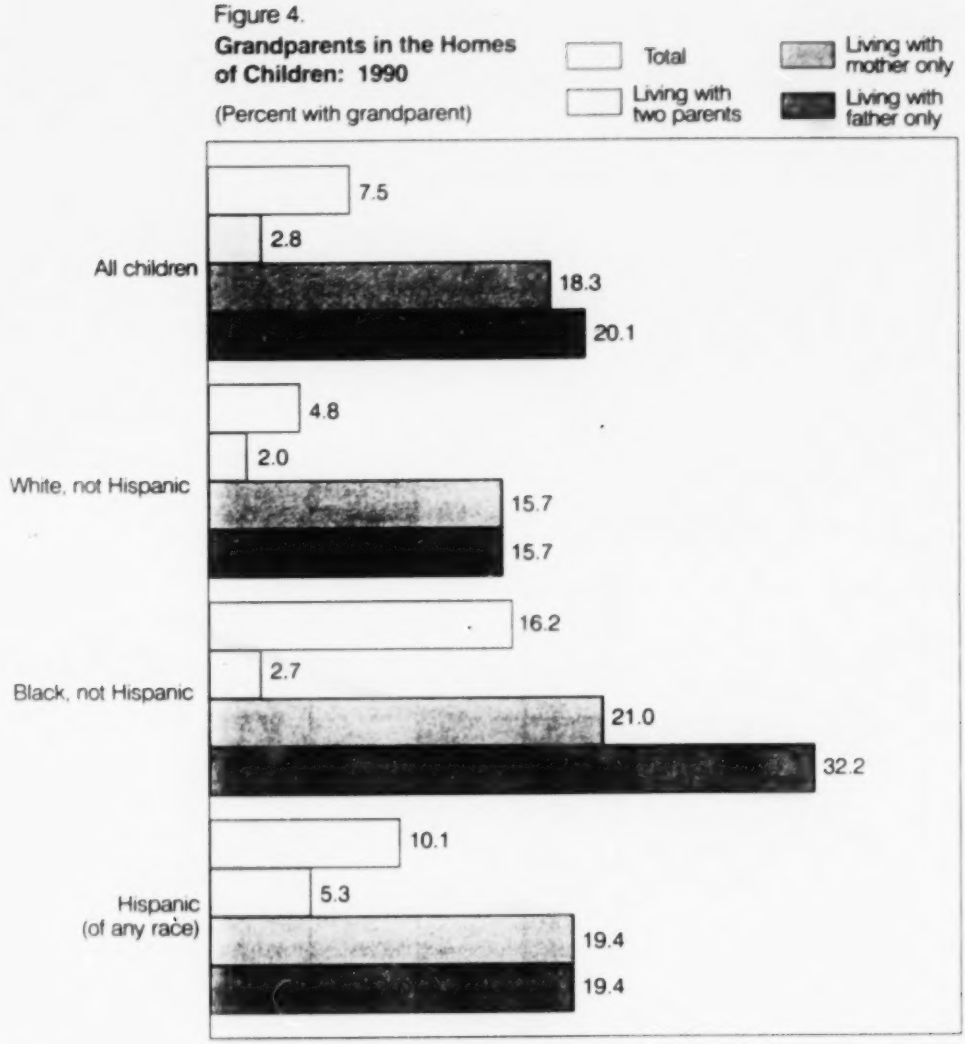
Only 3 percent of children in two-parent families in 1990 had a grandparent in the home.

Non-Hispanic White children (2 percent), non-Hispanic Black children (3 percent), and Hispanic children (5 percent) in two-parent families were about equally likely to live with a grandparent.

Children in one-parent families were more likely than those living with two parents to have a grandparent in the home.

About 80 percent of children in one-parent families did not live with a grandparent compared with about 97 percent of children in two-parent families.

Figure 4.
Grandparents in the Homes of Children: 1990
(Percent with grandparent)



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Most of us live in families with one, two, or three children.

The vast majority of preschool children under 6 years old in 1990 lived in families with one, two, or three children.

About 25 percent of preschoolers had no brothers or sisters, about 40 percent had only one sibling, and another 22 percent had two siblings.

Ninety percent of non-Hispanic White preschoolers lived in families with one to three children, and about 80 percent of non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic preschoolers also lived in small families.

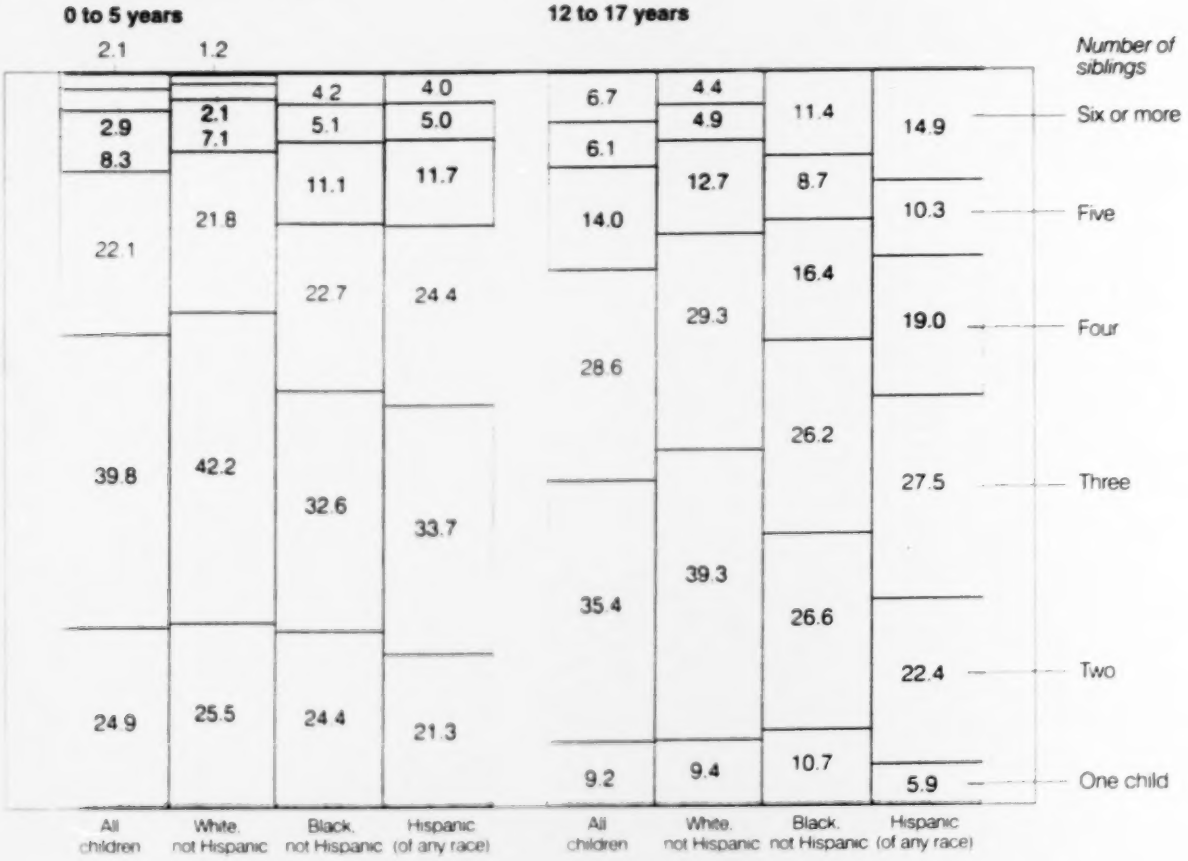
Adolescents had more brothers and sisters than preschool children, but most adolescents also lived in families with one, two, or three children.

The proportion of adolescents in families with one to three children was 78 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, 64 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks, and 56 percent for Hispanics.

No more than 15 percent of preschoolers and adolescents lived in large families with six or more children, regardless of their racial or ethnic heritage.

Figure 5
Number of Siblings in the Homes of Children 0 to 5 Years Old and 12 to 17 Years Old, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990

(Percent distribution by mother's number of children ever born for children living with mother)



The educational attainments of our parents rose during the past decade.

Children living with mothers who had at least a high school diploma increased from 74 percent in 1980 to 80 percent in 1990.

The proportion with mothers having a bachelor's degree rose from 11 percent to 18 percent.

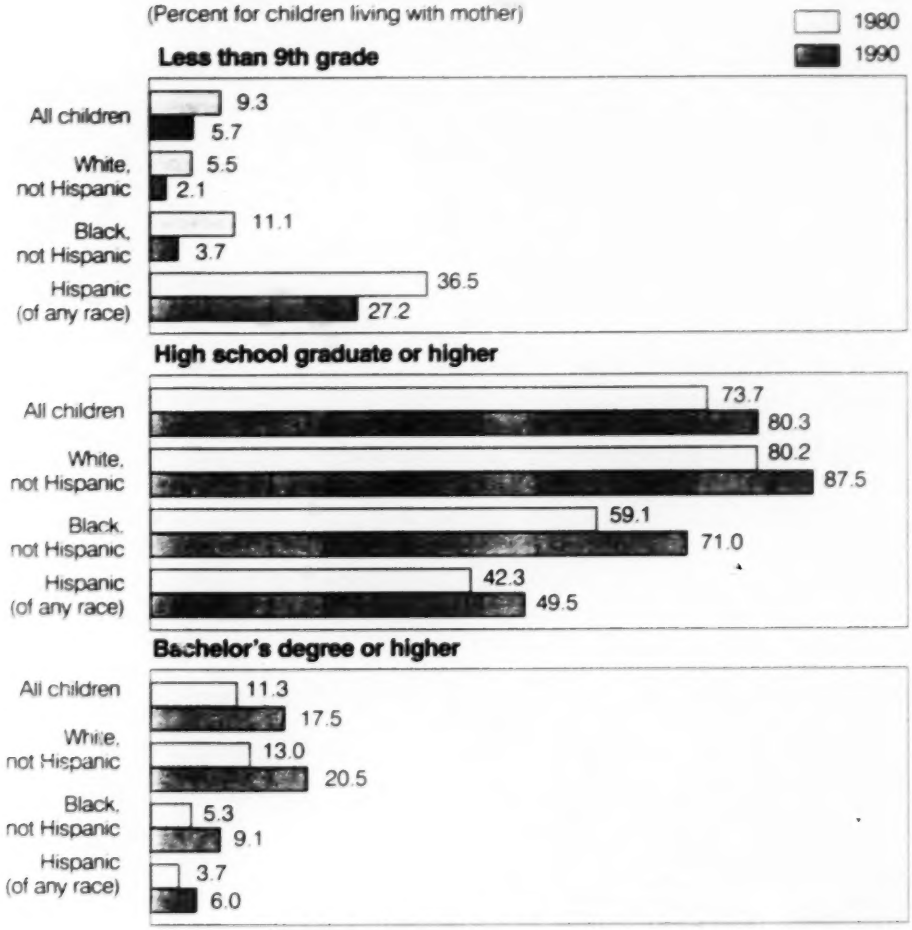
In 1990, non-Hispanic Black children were one-half as likely as non-Hispanic White children to have a mother with a bachelor's degree, and the proportion for Hispanics was much smaller.

Non-Hispanic Black children also were substantially less likely than non-Hispanic White children to have a mother with a high school diploma, and only 50 percent of Hispanic children had mothers with this much education.

One-fourth of Hispanic children had mothers with less than 9 years of education compared with fewer than 1 in 20 non-Hispanic White children and non-Hispanic Black children.

Figure 6.
Mother's Educational Attainment for Children: 1980 and 1990

(Percent for children living with mother)



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Nearly all of us who live with our fathers have a father who is employed, but many fathers are part-time workers.

In 1990, 96 percent of children living with their fathers (in father-only or two-parent families) had fathers who worked for pay.

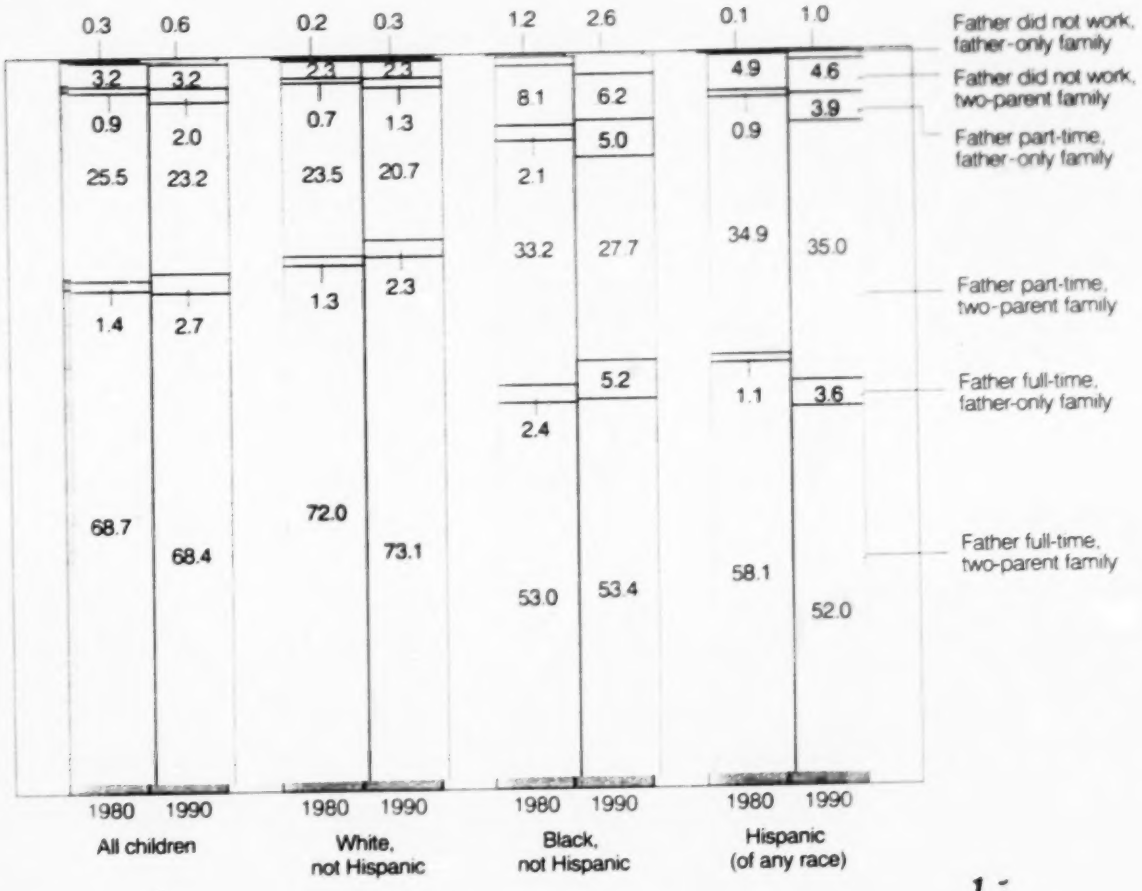
Seventy percent of children living with fathers had fathers who were full-time workers, while 26 percent had fathers who worked part time, and 4 percent had fathers who did not work.

Both non-Hispanic Black children and Hispanic children living with fathers were somewhat less likely than non-Hispanic White children living with fathers to have a father who worked.

One-fourth of non-Hispanic White children living with their fathers had fathers who worked part time or not at all, but the proportion was more than 4 in 10 for non-Hispanic Black children and Hispanic children who lived with their fathers.

Figure 7.
Father's Amount of Work and Parental Living Arrangements for Children: 1980 and 1990

(Percent distribution for children under 18 years old living with father)



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Most of us who live with our mothers have a mother who is employed.

Among children living with their mothers, the proportion with a working mother increased from 60 percent in 1980 to 72 percent in 1990.

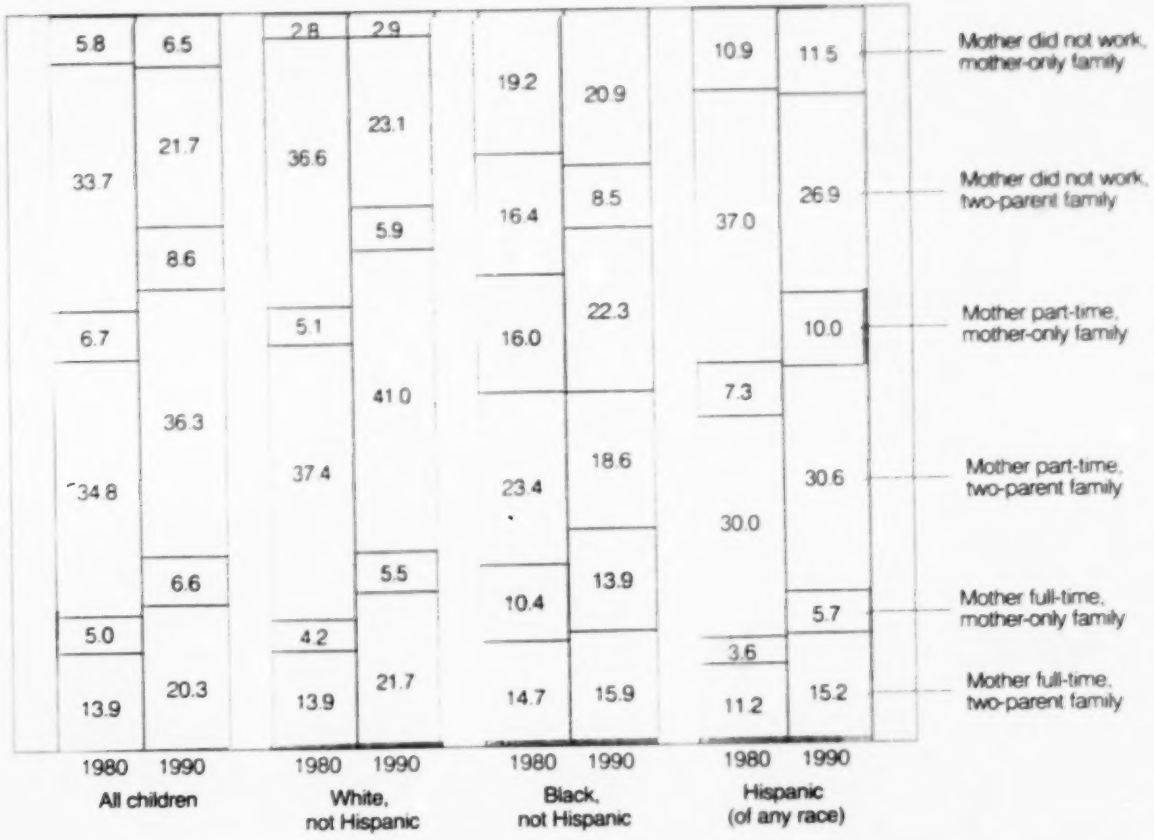
Most of the increase in the proportion of children with working mothers occurred because of the rise in mothers who were full-time workers.

By 1990, the proportion of children living with mothers whose mothers were full-time workers was 27 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, 30 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks, and 21 percent for Hispanics.

The proportion living with mothers who were part-time workers was substantially larger, at 47 percent for non-Hispanic Whites and 41 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks and for Hispanics.

Figure 8.
Mother's Amount of Work and Parental Living Arrangements for Children: 1980 and 1990

(Percent distribution for children under 18 years old living with mother)



For every one of us who lives in a "traditional" two-parent family, four of us live in "nontraditional" two-parent families.

In 1990, 14 percent of children lived in "traditional" families with fathers who worked full time year round and mothers who did not work during the year.

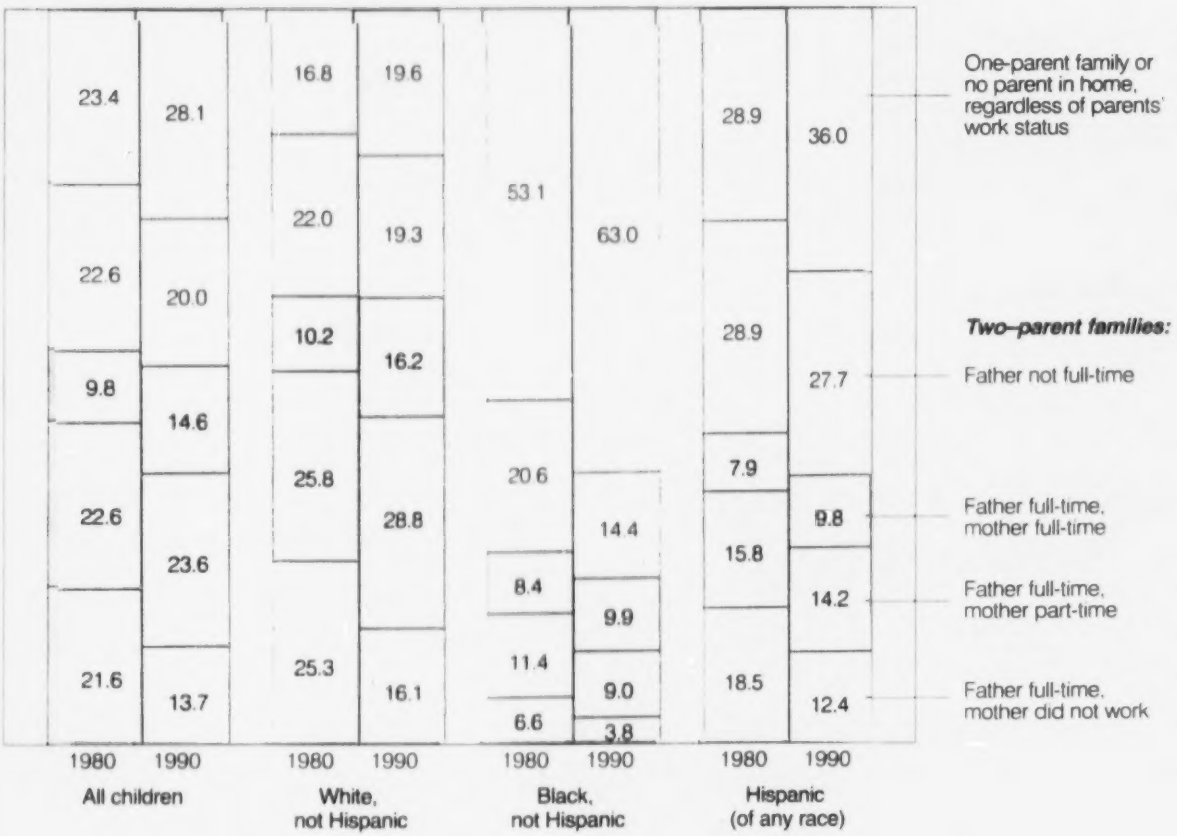
Four times as many children lived in "nontraditional" two-parent families, where the father was not a full-time worker, or where the mother did work.

Children were about equally likely to live in a "traditional" family with a fully-employed father and homemaking mother or in a "nontraditional" family where both parents were full-time workers.

Children were substantially more likely to live in a "nontraditional" two-parent family where the father was a full-time worker and the mother a part-time worker or where the father was a part-time worker.

Figure 9.
Father's and Mother's Amount of Work and Parental Living Arrangements for Children: 1980 and 1990

(Percent distribution for children under 18 years old)



At age 1 year, for every one of us who lives in "traditional" two-parent families, more than three of us live in "non-traditional" two-parent families.

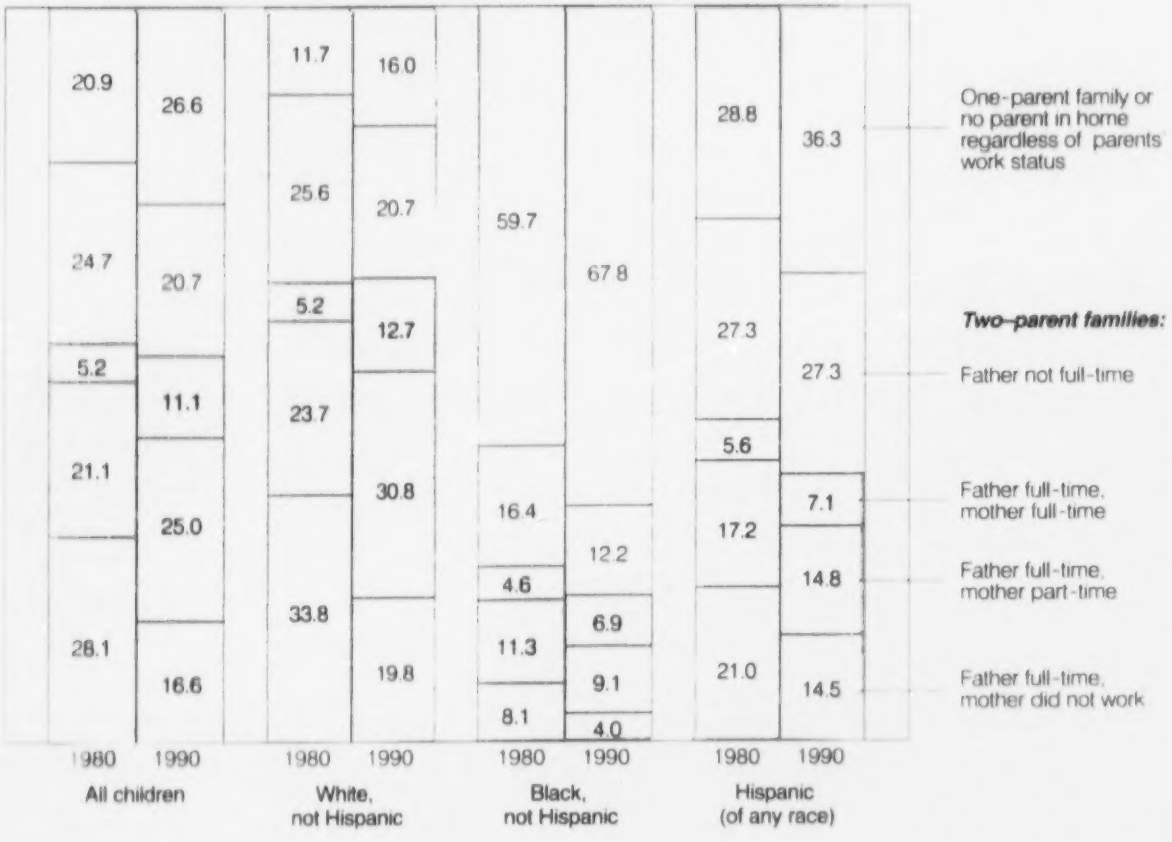
For children age 1, the proportion living with a father who worked full time year round and a mother who was a full-time homemaker declined from 28 percent in 1980 to 17 percent in 1990.

The proportion living in such "traditional" families declined from 34 percent to 20 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, from 8 percent to 4 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks, and from 21 percent to 15 percent for Hispanics.

In 1990, for every child age 1 living in "traditional" families with a fully-employed father and homemaking mother, there were more than three children who lived in "non-traditional" two-parent families with a father who was not a full-time worker or a mother who worked.

Figure 10.
Father's and Mother's Amount of Work and Parental Living Arrangements for Children 1 Year Old: 1980 and 1990

(Percent distribution)



The proportion of us in high and low income families increased during the 1980's.

Children in low income families increased from 24 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1990, while the proportion in high income families increased from 18 percent to 21 percent.

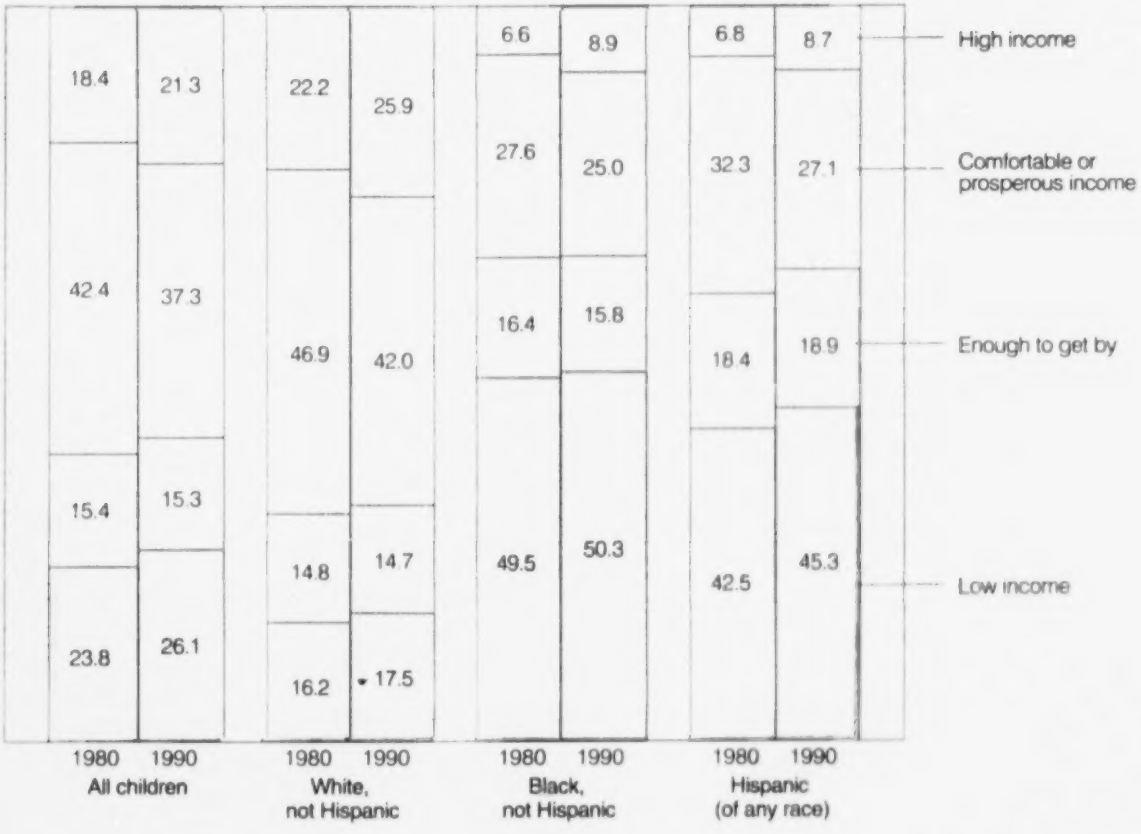
Between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of children with comfortable or prosperous family incomes declined from 42 percent to 37 percent.

Non-Hispanic White children in 1990 were about three times more likely than non-Hispanic Black children and Hispanic children to live in families with high incomes.

Comfortable or prosperous family incomes were also more often experienced by non-Hispanic White children than by non-Hispanic Black children or Hispanic children.

The proportion living in a family with low income was more than 2 1/2 times larger for non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic Whites.

Figure 11.
Family Income Level for Children: 1980 and 1990
(Percent distribution)



Our family incomes are higher if we live with two parents.

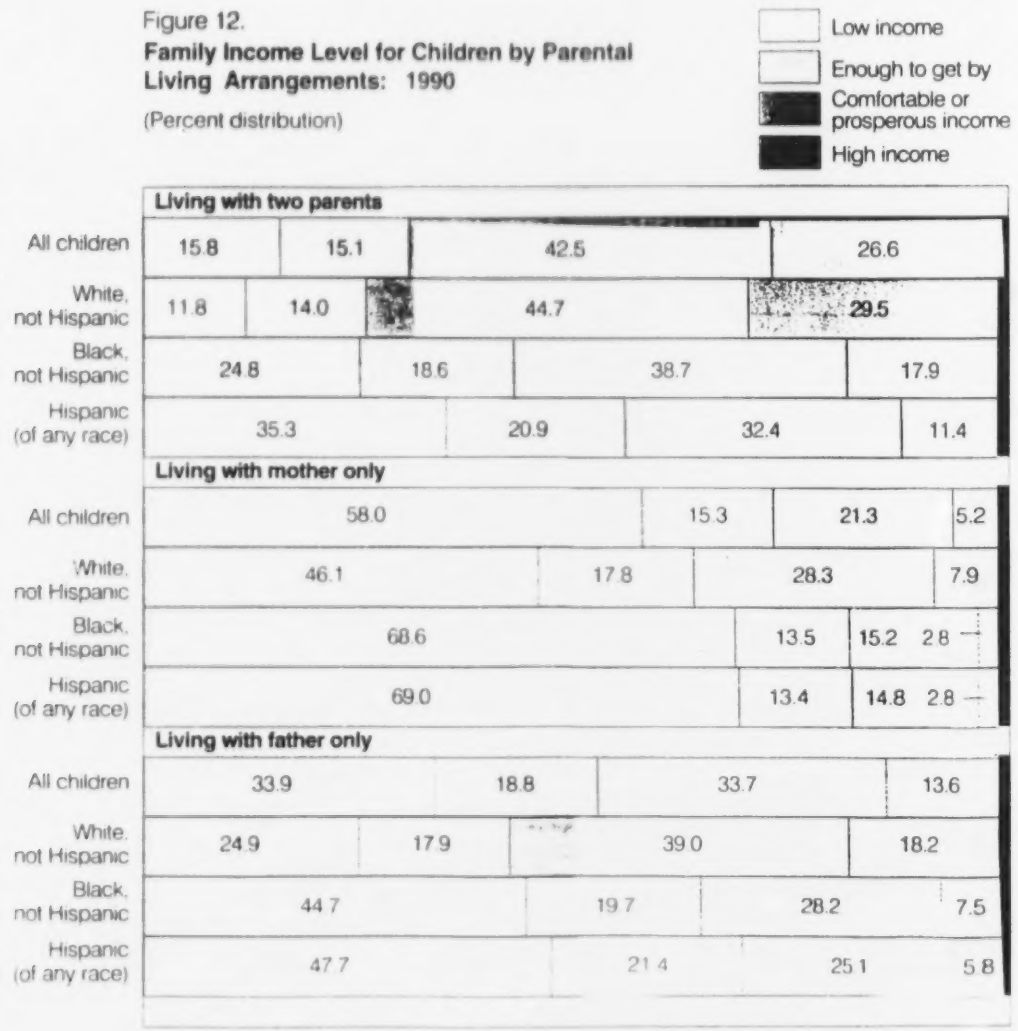
In 1990, 69 percent of children in two-parent families had comfortable or high family incomes compared with 47 percent in father-only families and 27 percent in mother-only families.

About 58 percent of children in mother-only families were low-income families compared with 34 percent of children in father-only families and 16 percent of children in two-parent families.

For children in two-parent families, the chances of living at comfortable or high income levels reached 74 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, but only 57 percent for non-Hispanic Blacks and 44 percent for Hispanics.

Among mother-only families, non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children were most likely to be in low-income families, at 69 percent for each compared with 46 percent for non-Hispanic White children.

Figure 12.
Family Income Level for Children by Parental Living Arrangements: 1990
(Percent distribution)



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Our official poverty rate is higher if we live with one parent.

The poverty rate for children in 1990 was 18 percent, but it was 3 or 4 times larger for non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic Whites.

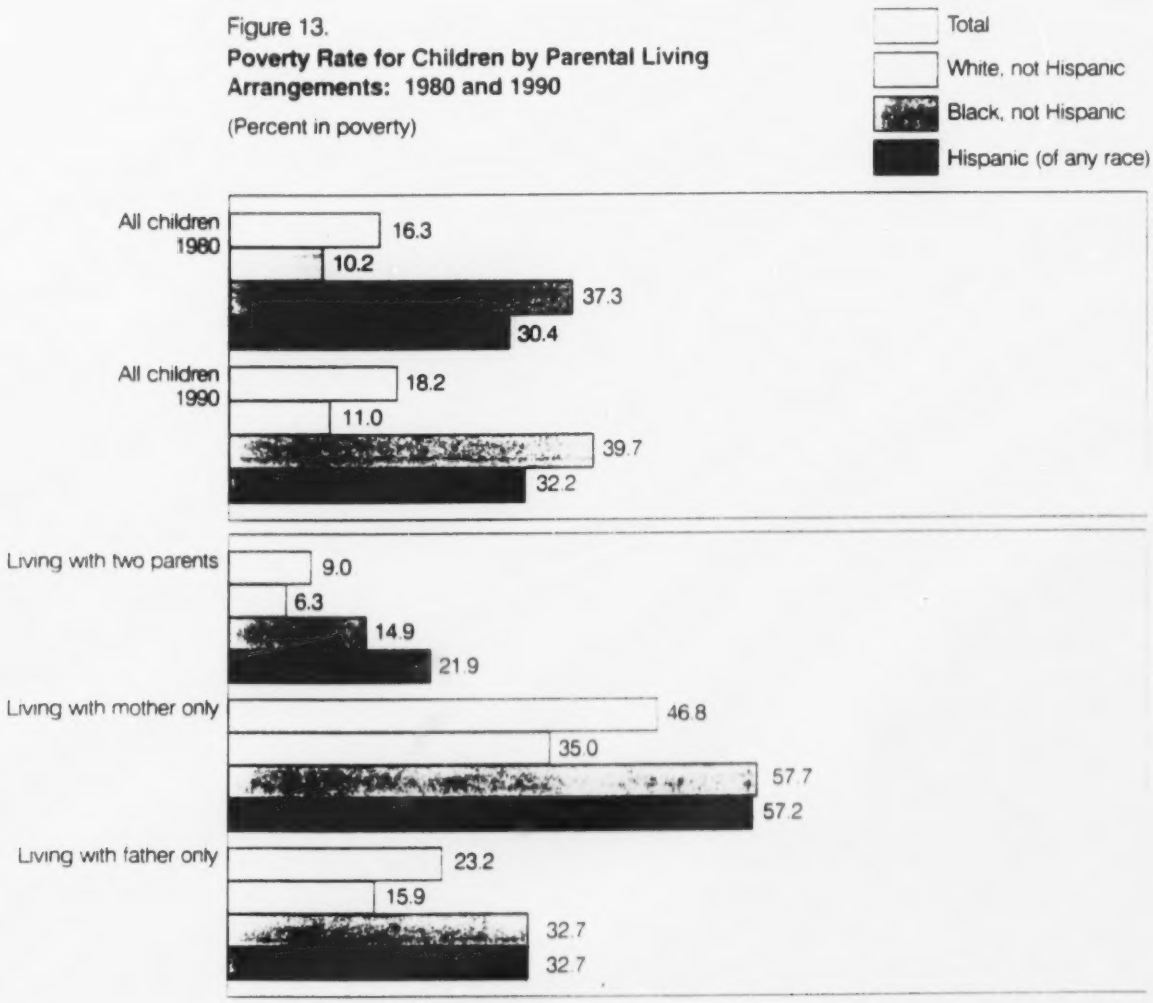
Nine percent of children in two-parent families were poor, but children in father-only families were more than twice as likely to be poor, and children in mother-only families were more than 5 times as likely to be poor.

Among children in two-parent families, the Hispanic poverty rate was more than 3 times greater than for non-Hispanic White children, and the rate for non-Hispanic Blacks was about 2 times the rate for non-Hispanic Whites.

The poverty rate for Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black children in mother-only families was much greater than for non-Hispanic Whites in mother-only families.

Figure 13.
Poverty Rate for Children by Parental Living Arrangements: 1980 and 1990

(Percent in poverty)



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Our chances of having a comfortable, prosperous, or high family income depend on the amount of time our parents work.

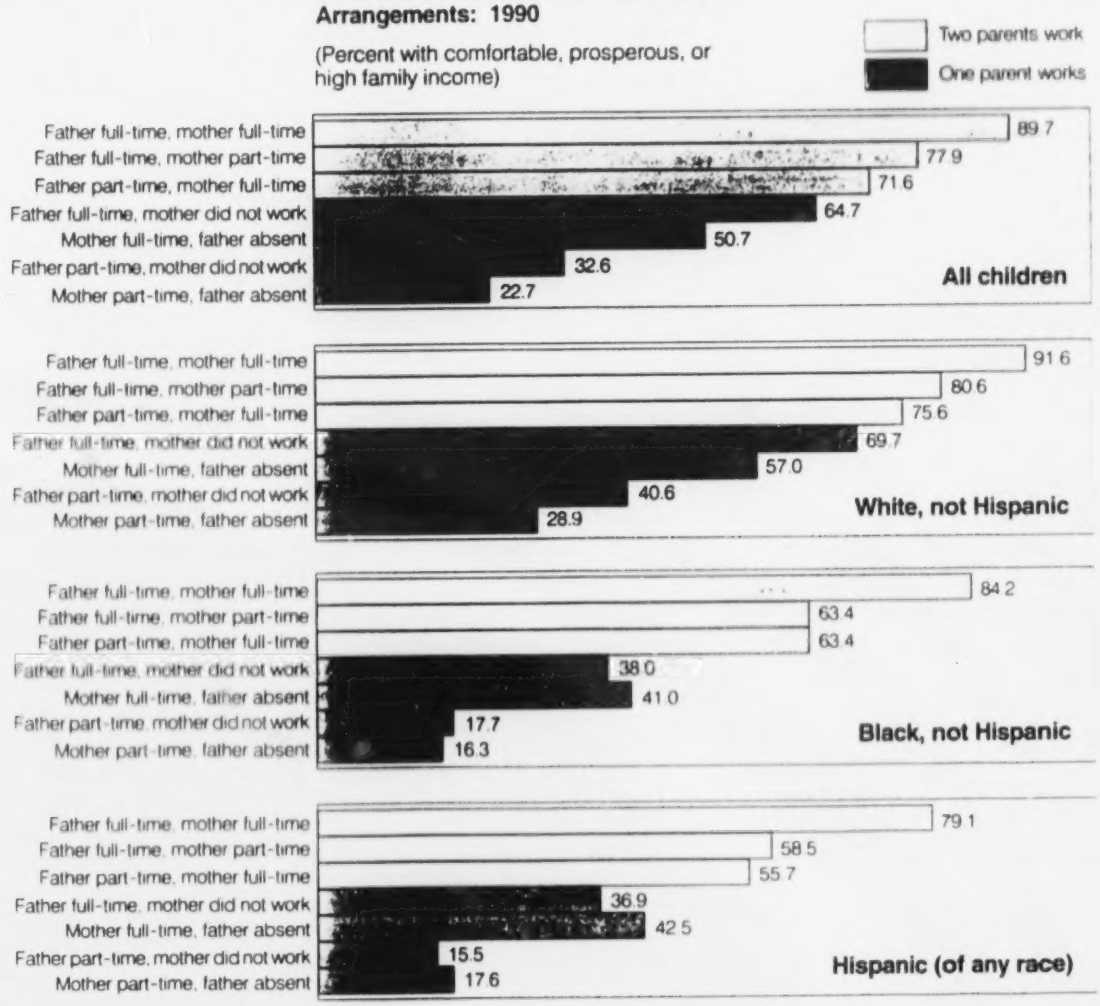
For non-Hispanic White children in families with only one working parent, the proportion experiencing a comfortable, prosperous, or high standard of living was higher if the parent was working full time than if the parent was working part time.

For non-Hispanic Black children and for Hispanic children in families with only one employed parent, the proportions experiencing this standard of living were substantially lower than for non-Hispanic Whites.

For children living with two employed parents, if one worked full time year round and the other worked part time, the proportion experiencing this economic level was higher than in families with parents who worked less.

Figure 14.
Percent With Comfortable, Prosperous, or High Family Income for Children by Parental Amount of Work and Living Arrangements: 1990

(Percent with comfortable, prosperous, or high family income)



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Our chances of having a low family income are similar in "traditional" families and in mother-only families where the mother is a full-time worker.

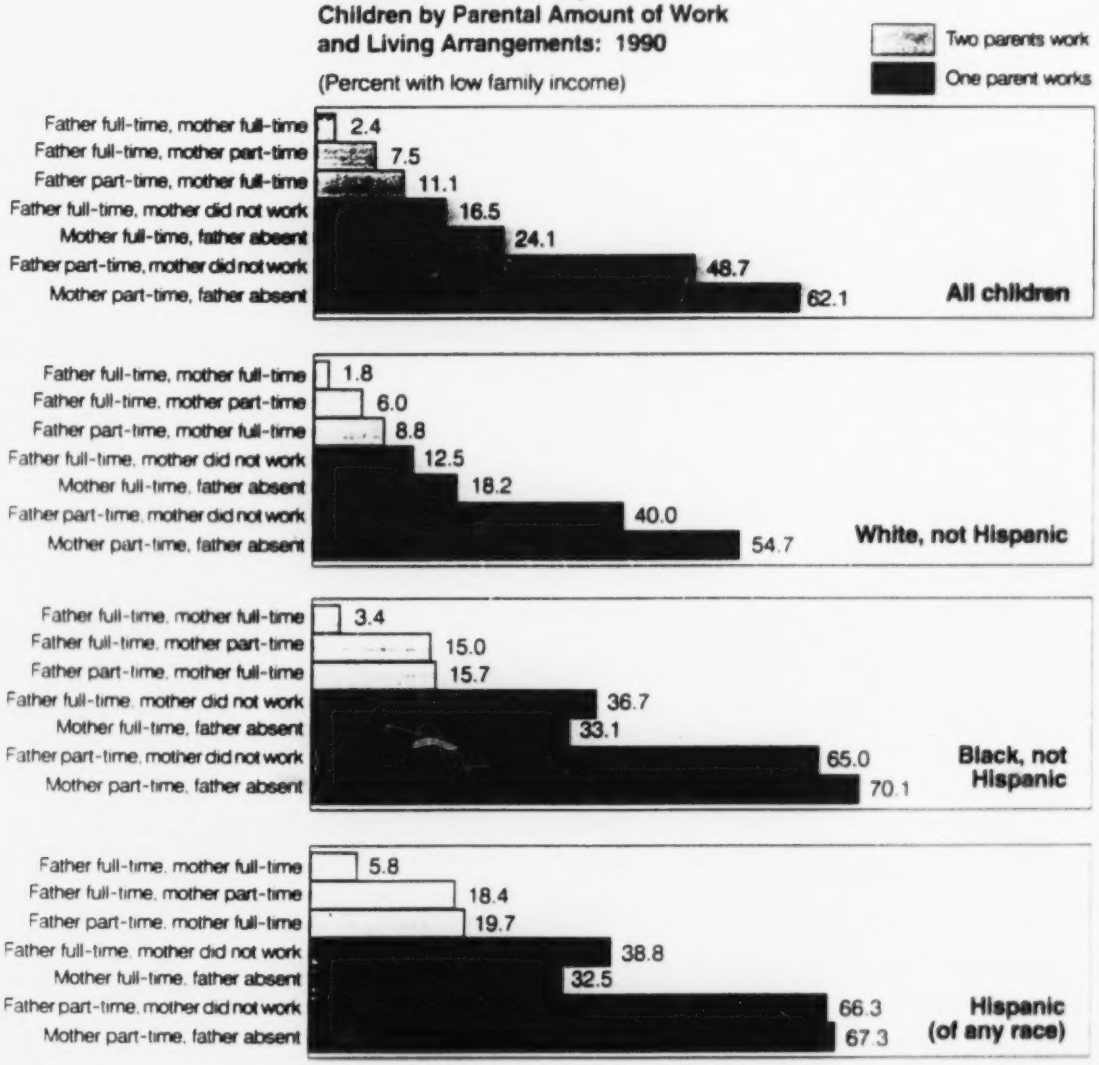
For non-Hispanic White children in "traditional" families where the father was a full-time worker and the mother a full-time homemaker and in mother-only families where the mother was a full-time worker, the chances of having a low family income were small.

Non-Hispanic White children in families where only one parent worked were 2 times more likely to have a low family income if the parent worked part time than if the parent worked full time.

For non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children, the chances of having a low family income were much lower in "traditional" families and mother-only families where one parent worked full time year round than in those with one employed parent who worked part time.

Figure 15.
Percent With Low Family Income for Children by Parental Amount of Work and Living Arrangements: 1990

(Percent with low family income)



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Whether we live with two parents or only our mother, our official poverty rates are higher if we are Black or Hispanic.

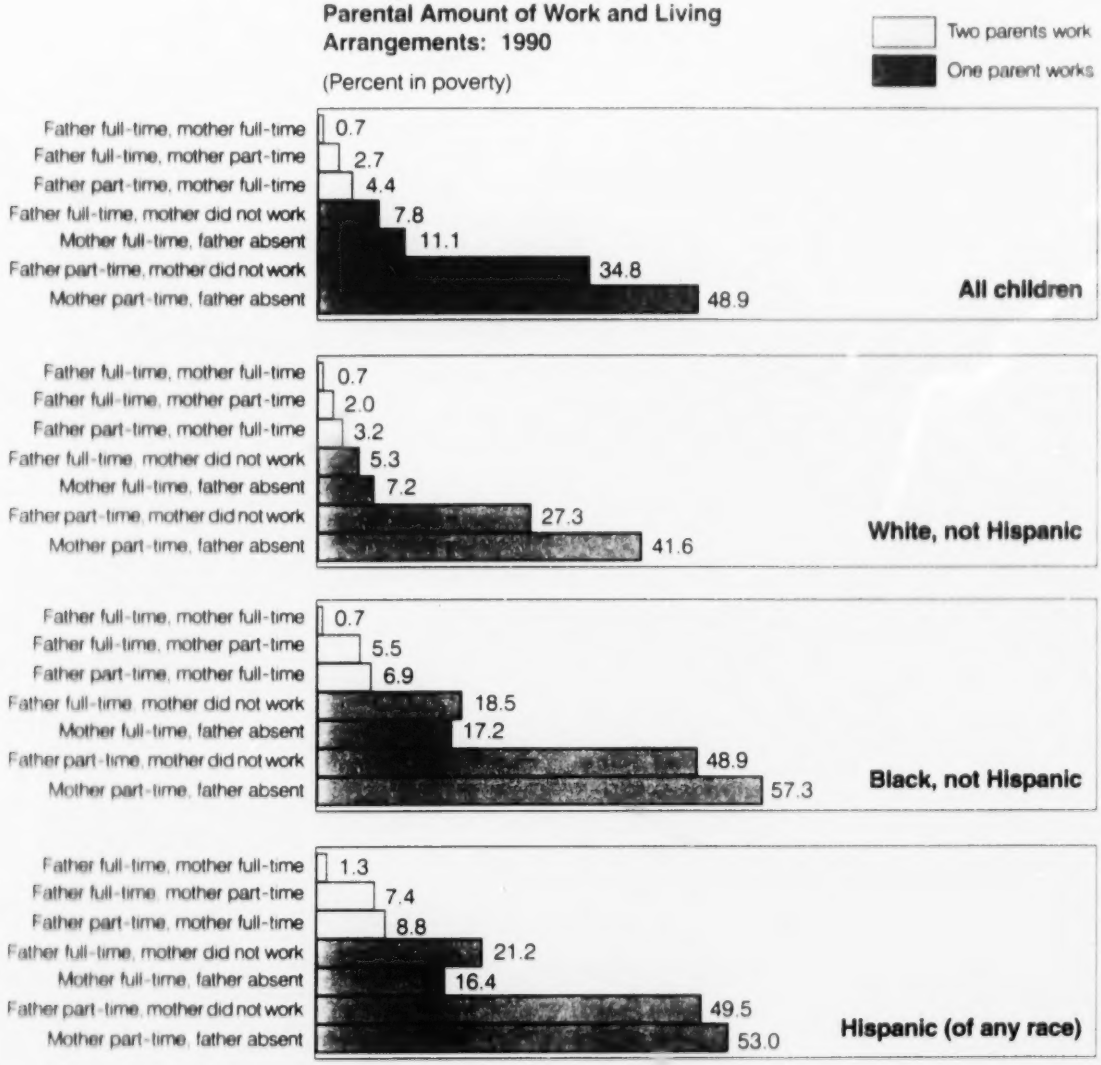
Poverty rates were lower for non-Hispanic White, than for non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic children, if they lived with two working parents.

Whether they lived with two parents or only their mother, if children had only one working parent and the parent was a full-time worker, the poverty rate was 2 to 4 times greater for non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics than it was for non-Hispanic Whites.

The poverty rates were higher still for children in two-parent and mother-only families with one working parent who was a part-time worker.

Figure 16.
Poverty Rate for Children by Parental Amount of Work and Living Arrangements: 1990

(Percent in poverty)



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Information in this report is based on the 1980 and 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Public Use Microdata Samples. Estimates are based on a subsample of the full census sample and may differ from the official 100-percent or sample census figures. The deviation of a sample estimate from the average of all possible samples is called the sampling error. Sampling error measures the variation among the estimates from all possible samples and is a measure of the precision with which an estimate from a particular sample approximates the average result. Differences also can occur because of the interview situation and the processing rules differing between the 100-percent and sample tabulations. These types of differences are referred to as nonsampling errors. Some estimates were drawn from Donald J. Hernandez, *America's Children: Resources From Family, Government, and the Economy,* Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1993.

Other reports in this series:

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